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HIGH LICENSE JUSTIFIED.

THE regulation and control of the liquor traffic is one of the most difficult problems with which modern governments have to deal. The uncontrolled or unregulated sale of intoxicating liquors is recognized by all civilized governments to be an evil of such magnitude that it cannot be safely permitted, and all civilized governments have laws controlling the traffic, more or less restrictive in their nature.

These laws may be divided into two classes : one of which, under the form of license or taxation, describes rules and regulations under which intoxicants may be sold, and imposes a license fee, or tax, upon the seller, and undertakes to enforce these regulations or restrictions through the ordinary means of the law officers of the government, by its prosecuting attorneys, or, in cities, through the police department.

The other class or system seeks to entirely suppress the traffic by prohibitory laws, usually by putting a prohibitory clause into the constitution of the State government, in order that Prohibition may not be repealed by an Act of the Legislature. The first method of treatment is the one in almost universal use throughout the world ; the other has been tried only in a few States in this country.

It is not necessary to discuss the question of Prohibition *per se*, or even to go into an examination of its effects where it is in operation, for, under our system of government, which is a government of majorities, no constitution can be made or changed, or laws passed, which do not meet with the approval of a majority of the people, and if, by any means, legislative bodies brought to pass laws which do not meet with the approval of a majority of their constituents, the legislature is usually changed at the next election, and the obnoxious laws are repealed.

The Prohibitionists in this State have refused to co-operate

with their fellow citizens in any system of temperance legislation for the restriction of the evils of intemperance, unless it provided for absolute Prohibition. Their numbers are very small, and the prospect of their securing a majority of the people to their views seems to be hopeless. In the election just passed, the Prohibition candidate for Governor polled almost exactly two per cent. of the entire vote of the State, and as the State government is the only one which has any control over the sale of liquor, it must be assumed that a very small proportion of our people are in favor of absolute Prohibition.

For certainly, nothing less than an absolute majority of the entire people of the State could hope to enact Prohibition legislation or to maintain it, and experience proves everywhere, that Prohibition cannot be maintained successfully, unless a very large majority are in favor of it. Where a *bare* majority are successful in forcing their views upon the community, the law is invariably violated and invaded, and usually much more harm comes from the sale of liquors under such conditions than in its open sale regulated by law.

As all people admit the great evil growing out of the traffic in intoxicating liquors, and also the great additional cost to our Government, through the crime and pauperism created by it, the question arises, What ought an intelligent people to do in regard to it? If prohibition is impossible, and even of doubtful value if it could be adopted, what course remains open by which the evils of this system can be mitigated, crime lessened, and pauperism minimized? There seems to be a growing sentiment, not only in the State, but in the entire country, that high license, in the form of a strong law, carrying with it severe penalties for violation of the terms of the license, is at present the only feasible remedy, and the only way in which, under the present condition of public opinion, we can hope to secure any reformation. Time was when high license was merely a theory, for it had not been put into practice, but that time has passed. High license is no longer an experiment; it is no longer a theory; it is an accomplished fact.

In a large number of the States in the Union, high license laws have been in operation for from one to five years. Wherever they have been tried, they have produced many beneficial results. They have, in all cases, largely reduced the number of saloons, and especially those of the lower and vile order, where most of

the crimes are committed. In some of the States, high license laws reduced the number of saloons about one-half. In some of the cities and States the reduction has been much larger. The reduction of the number of saloons has been followed, in almost all cases, by a corresponding reduction in the amount of crime committed in the community. This is verified by reference to the records of the courts, jails and prisons, which, in all cases, show a large falling off in the number of arrests and commitments. This is true in the city of Philadelphia where the high license law went into effect on the first of June of this year. The records of the city of Philadelphia show that the commitments for vice, growing out of drunkenness, for the four months of June, July, August and September, of the year 1887, before the high license law went into effect, were ten thousand nine hundred and fifty-six, and for the corresponding four months of the year 1888, when the law was in force, the number of commitments was six thousand nine hundred and twenty-nine, showing a decrease in the four months, under the present law, of four thousand and twenty-seven. The records also show a decrease in the commitments to the House of Correction, for the same months as last mentioned, for the year 1887, two thousand and thirty-two; for the corresponding months of 1888, under the present law, one thousand three hundred and eighty-six, showing a decrease of six hundred and forty-six. The same records show that for the corresponding months of 1887, there were arrested for drunkenness on the Sundays of these months, five hundred and twenty-six persons; for the Sundays of the corresponding months of 1888, only one hundred and forty-six arrests were made for drunkenness.

These figures prove conclusively to my mind that the high license law in the city of Philadelphia is in every way beneficial to its people. The number of saloons before the law was passed was, in round numbers, six thousand; the number of saloons now in the city is a little less than one thousand three hundred. The reports from the whole State of Pennsylvania show substantially the same condition of affairs throughout the whole State. The benefits coming to the State of Pennsylvania under the operations of this law can only be estimated by the millions of dollars in actual saving to the people in the way of taxation for the support of paupers and criminals, and greater comforts and benefits that come to the homes of all of

these men who have been saved from drunkenness and consequent arrest and incarceration.

Similar results are to be found in nearly all the States which have adopted the high license system. Everywhere the statistics prove that as the rate of license increases the number of saloons is diminished, and that as the number of saloons is diminished, crime is proportionately reduced, and therefore the people are proportionately benefited. In Omaha City, where the license fee is one thousand dollars, the number of the saloons is one to every four hundred and twenty-six of the population; in Kansas City, where the license fee is eight hundred and forty-five dollars, the number of saloons is one to every three hundred and nine of the population; in San Francisco, where the license fee is eighty-four dollars, the saloons are one to every eighty-four of the population; in Philadelphia, before the high license law was passed, the license fee was fifty dollars, and the saloons were one to every one hundred and forty-two of the people; in Baltimore, where the license fee is fifty dollars, the number of saloons is one to every one hundred and fifteen of the population. The reports from Minnesota state that the effect of the law has been to reduce the consumption of liquor in a proportion equal to or greater than the reduction in the number of saloons, and that the law has not only decreased saloons and drunkenness and increased the revenue of most of the counties, but it has tended to increase the purity of elections.

And this is a most important consideration in favor of the adoption of high license. Wherever it has been tried, it has taken the saloon out of politics; that is to say, it has destroyed the political power of the saloon, which, in many of our States, has become so great as to substantially control the majority of our municipal governments, and not unfrequently, to control the action of a political party in the entire State. The saloon keepers have thought it necessary to go into politics, in order that they might control the liquor excise boards, and thereby keep down the rate of the license fee. If the license fee is fixed, by general law, at a proper figure, it must then be accepted by all parties engaged in the traffic, and they will no longer have any occasion to exercise any undue influence in the local politics of the community in which they reside, and therefore, will not contribute money for the purpose of controlling elections, as they are doing at the

present time. It is undoubtedly true that the liquor dealers of the State of New York pay more money, in the way of contributions for political purposes, than they would have to pay under a proper high license law.

No greater evil can come to any community, than to have its government, either local or State, fall under the control of any one class of its citizens, to the exclusion of all other classes, and this evil is aggravated when a class is engaged in a business where they are almost constantly violating the law, or at least, are constantly tempted to do so. The interest of the liquor dealer is always against that of the community, and, therefore, he constantly fears that laws or regulations may be made against his business and against his interests; hence, he seeks to obtain control of the political organization with which he may be affiliated. He makes himself influential in the primaries, influential in the nomination of the law officers, who are the persons to be charged with the enforcement of the laws against himself, and, as a result, if he is able to control the primaries and conventions, he expects immunity from the officers whom he shall aid to nominate and to elect.

The high license laws, now in operation in the various States, have taken the saloons, as a class, out of politics. The high rate of license fee which they pay renders them disinclined to contribute to the funds of any political party. They are much more careful not to violate the provisions of their license, because the pecuniary loss to them by its cancellation is much greater than before. They undertake to carry on their business in a more orderly way, so as to avoid the interference of the police or of the law officers. They feel assured that so long as they pay this increased rate and do not violate the provisions of their license, that they will not be interfered with by the officers of the government, and they are, consequently, not disposed to take any greater interest in politics than they would if they were engaged in any other business.

The evils growing out of organized political action by the liquor dealers of the country cannot be overestimated. Their places of business are convenient rendezvous for politicians of all classes, and much of the ordinary political work is carried on in the convenient saloon, the saloon keeper himself desiring it to be there, and giving conveniences for meetings of politicians, thereby increasing his own receipts. This evil, of course, is not entirely

eradicated by a system of high license, but it is reduced to the minimum.

Another very important result growing out of high license is the increased receipts from the saloons, by which they are made to pay a much larger proportion of the cost to the people of crime and pauperism caused by the traffic. While the number of saloons is usually reduced fifty per cent., the receipts coming in to the local governments from that source are doubled, and sometimes quadrupled, depending upon the rate of the license fee. The cost to the people of crime and pauperism, which can be traced directly to the use of intoxicating liquors, is much larger than our people generally believe it to be. The direct charge upon the taxpayers of the State of New York for crime and pauperism in the State, was, in round numbers, twenty-five millions of dollars. Of this, eighteen millions is directly chargeable to the excessive use of intoxicating drinks. All the saloons of the State of New York paid last year, as license fees, a little over two millions of dollars, leaving a balance against them of nearly seventeen millions. This seventeen millions was levied as a tax upon all the taxable property of the State in various counties for the maintenance of our jails, poor houses, constables, police and the officers charged with the execution of our criminal laws. A proper high license law would treble the receipts from that source, and at the same time would greatly reduce the amount of crime and pauperism in the State, thereby reducing our taxation for the support of our criminals and paupers.

There are about thirty-four thousand saloons in the State of New York. If high license would reduce them one-half, seventeen thousand men would be compelled to find some productive employment. It would be a great source of profit to the State, and in addition to these seventeen thousand saloon keepers it would be fair to assume that at least one other man, or helper, is employed about the establishment. This would add seventeen thousand more able-bodied men who would be put at productive work. In addition to that, the number of drunkards would be greatly reduced and all these men would be returned to active and productive industries. In short, the benefits that would accrue to our people are only to be estimated by the tens of millions of dollars.

It is objected to our present license laws, that they are not

enforced. Experience shows that in all the States where high license laws have been enacted the laws are well enforced, for each licenser becomes at once an assistant officer of the government to enforce the law. Having paid a high license fee, he cannot afford to have his neighbors sell without payment of a similar fee, and the reports from all the States and cities where the law is in effect prove conclusively that there is much less difficulty in enforcing a high license law than in enforcing the present, or low license law of this State.

A large reduction in the number of saloons, in the cities, by this system, enables the police authorities to keep the saloons under strict surveillance, and see that the provisions of their license are not violated.

A careful survey of the field of temperance legislature will, in my judgment, lead every candid person to the conclusion, that, at present, the only feasible temperance reform which gives promise of any considerable benefit to our people must be found in the direction of high license.

WARNER MILLER.